AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended): A moving picture encoding method ~~executed by using an~~ <u>executed by using an</u> <u>encoder</u> for performing a multi-frame motion prediction with reference to a plurality of picture frames, comprising:

selecting at least one reference frame ~~form~~ <u>from</u> a plurality of reference frames of the same picture type which are used for the multi-frame motion prediction of a certain frame; and

encoding <u>by said encoder</u> the selected reference frame in a higher picture quality than the other reference frames of the same picture type.

2. (original): The method according to claim 1, wherein the frame encoded in the higher picture quality is a frame to which more code amount is assigned than the other frames of the same picture type.

3. (original): The method according to claim 1, wherein the frame encoded in the higher picture quality is a frame having a smaller quantizing parameter than the other frames of the same picture type.

4. (original): The method according to claim 1, wherein the frame encoded in the higher picture quality is a P-picture frame.

5. (original): The method according to claim 1, wherein the frame encoded in the higher picture quality is a B-picture frame.

6. (original): The method according to claim 5, further comprising a step of:

when a plurality of continuous B-picture frames is encoded, in comparison with a final B-picture frame in said continuous B-picture frames, encoding B-picture frames prior to said final B-picture frame in a higher picture quality.

7. (currently amended): The method according to claim 1,

wherein said selecting step comprises selecting a plurality of reference frames, and said encoding step comprises encoding said plurality of selected reference frames; said method further comprising a step of:

arranging the frames encoded in the higher picture quality at constant frame intervals.

8. (currently amended): The method according to claim 6,

wherein said selecting step comprises selecting a plurality of reference frames, and said encoding step comprises encoding said plurality of selected reference frames; said method further comprising a step of:

arranging the frames encoded in the higher picture quality at constant frame intervals.

9. (original): The method according to claim 1, further comprising a step of:

adaptively changing a frame interval of the frames encoded in the higher picture quality in accordance with differential information and motion information between a reference frame and a subject frame to be encoded.

10. (original): The method according to claim 6, further comprising a step of:

adaptively changing a frame interval of the frames encoded in the higher picture quality in accordance with differential information and motion information between a reference frame and a subject frame to be encoded.

11. (previously presented): A moving picture encoding apparatus for performing a multi-frame motion prediction with reference to a plurality of picture frames, comprising:

selection means for selecting at least one reference frame from a plurality of reference frames of the same picture type which are used for the multi-frame motion prediction of a certain frame;

and encoding means for encoding the selected reference frame in a higher picture quality than the other reference frames of the same picture type.

12. (original): The apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said encoding means assigns more code amount to the selected reference frame than the other reference frames of the same picture type.

13. (original): The apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said encoding means sets a smaller quantizing parameter for the selected reference frame than the other reference frames of the same picture type.

14. (original): The apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said selected reference frame is a P-picture frame.

15. (original): The apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said selected reference frame is a B-picture frame.

16. (original): The apparatus according to claim 15, wherein said selection means, from a plurality of continuous B-picture frames, selects a B-picture frame prior to a final B-picture frame in said continuous B-picture frames.

17. (original): The apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said selection means selects said reference frame at constant frame intervals.

18. (original): The apparatus according to claim 16, wherein said selection means selects said reference frame at constant frame intervals.

19. (original): The apparatus according to claim 11, further comprising:

moving picture analysis means for outputting differential information and motion information between a reference frame and a subject frame to be encoded,

wherein said selection means selects said reference frame in a manner that frame intervals of reference frames to be selected are adaptively changed in accordance with said differential information and said motion information.

20. (original): The apparatus according to claim 16, further comprising:

moving picture analysis means for outputting differential information and motion information between a reference frame and a subject frame to be encoded:

wherein said selection means selects said reference frame in a manner that frame intervals of reference frames to be selected are adaptively changed in accordance with said differential information and said motion information.

21. (previously presented): An input/output apparatus to/from which moving picture data encoded by performing a multi-frame motion prediction with reference to a plurality of picture frames is input or output:

wherein said encoded moving picture data includes a frame encoded in a higher picture quality than the other frames of the same picture type in reference frames used for the multi-frame motion prediction of a certain frame.

22. (currently amended): An input/output apparatus to/from which moving picture data encoded by performing a multi-frame motion prediction with reference to a plurality of picture frames is input and output, comprising:

a video decoder for decoding said encoded moving picture data; and

monitor means for monitoring a picture type, a reference frame, a quantizing parameter, a variable length code, and a frame memory, supplied from said video decoder 4 and for determining whether or not said encoded moving picture data includes a reference frame that is used for the multi-frame prediction and that is encoded in the higher picture quality than the other frames of the same picture type.

23. - 26. (canceled).